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OO RUEHDE RUEHROV RUEHTRO
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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9307
INFO RUCNSOM/SOMALIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHMFIUU/CJTF HOA
RUZEFAA/CDR USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RUZEFAA/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 000810

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR AF/E AND ACTING A/S CARTER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [SO](#)

SUBJECT: SOMALIA - Aweys' Return to Mogadishu

Summary

¶1. (SBU) On April 23, opposition leader Hassan Dahir Aweys (Hawiye/Habar Gedir/Ayr) returned to Mogadishu after a more than two-year absence. With a checkered past that has found Aweys in the leadership of many of Somalia's Islamic movements, he is now considered the leader of the Hisbul Islam (HI) alliance. Aweys arrived via a chartered plane from Asmara, Eritrea and was met by heavily armed militias reportedly dispatched by fellow HI leader Omar Iman. On April 23, Aweys addressed a handful of supporters announcing that he would engage peacefully with the government and that he would address the public in a rally the following day. On April 24, Aweys addressed hundreds of supporters in a relatively isolated neighborhood of Mogadishu. Though he said he advocated peace, Aweys unequivocally stated that AMISOM should leave the country immediately. He welcomed parliament's endorsement of Sharia but stated that this version of Sharia could not be authentic because it passed muster with Ethiopia and the U.S. While some believe that Aweys still wields considerable weight within his clan, our contacts also agree that Aweys has lost the influence he once enjoyed which would enable him to challenge Sharif in his leadership position. Most recognize that Aweys still has the potential to cause trouble even if he must strike a conciliatory note with the TFG. End summary.

Aweys Returns

¶2. (SBU) Opposition leader Hassan Dahir Aweys (Hawiye/Habar Gedir/Ayr) returned to Mogadishu on April 23 after a more than two-year absence. Aweys was the Chairman of the now-defunct Al Itihad Al-Islami, Chairman of the Supreme Consultative Council of the former Union of Islamic Courts (ICU), and Central Committee Member of the Asmara-based Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS-A). Aweys is now considered the leader of the Hisbul Islam (HI) alliance. Aweys has most recently been based in Asmara, Eritrea, from where he has spouted anti- Transitional Federal Government (TFG) rhetoric, especially after his break with current TFG President Sharif.

¶3. (SBU) Aweys arrived on a chartered aircraft from Asmara, Eritrea at K50 airstrip, in Lower Shabelle region. The airstrip is in an area under Hisbul Islam (HI) control. Aweys was reportedly accompanied by seven other senior officials from the ARS-Asmara group, of which Aweys is the de facto leader. Heavily-armed militias with several technicals, reportedly sent by fellow HI

leader Omar Iman Abubakar, were at the airstrip to meet Aweys. Aweys met with Omar Iman and senior HI leaders including Yusuf "Indha Adde" and some members of his Ayr subclan. Sources in Mogadishu informed us that Aweys arrived in Mogadishu by road after a brief stopover at Afgoye where he held a closed-door breakfast meeting with local HI leaders.

¶14. (SBU) We confirmed from several of our Mogadishu contacts that on April 23 Aweys went to the former pasta factory, the HI headquarters, and addressed some journalists and a handful of people who turned up to welcome him. Iman began by announcing Aweys' arrival and stated that the HI leader will be meeting with various sectors of society. He announced a large rally on April 24 where Aweys will address the public, and that further meetings will be held to give more details on Aweys' return.

¶15. (SBU) Aweys thanked God for his return home and for granting him the "victory" accorded to true believers. He said that they will employ peaceful measures and not violent means in dealing with the government. A contact in the Office of the President told us Aweys attended an Ayr lunch reception in Mogadishu on April 24 where the community queried his position on the political situation in Somalia.

Rally Demonstrates Continued
Opposition to TFG and AMISOM

¶16. (SBU) The afternoon of April 24, Aweys addressed hundreds of supporters at the former police station in the relatively isolated

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Wardhigley district of Mogadishu. (Note: This neighborhood is controlled by HI.) Many observers told us the relatively low turnout at this small venue is evidence that Aweys' arrival did not precipitate an outpouring of public support. Aweys began his remarks by stating that he favors peace and opposes any violent means of engagement. However, almost immediately, he launched into a criticism of the AMISOM presence in Somalia and called on all Somalis to force them to leave "just like we did the Ethiopians." Media reported that Aweys said, "AMISOM is not a peacekeeping force ... They are bacteria in Somalia. Somalia has not yet reached peaceful agreement. We are left with little time to fight and achieve our Islamic objective." Aweys came close to calling for violent opposition to AMISOM, and by comparing the AU forces with those of Ethiopia, the intent was clear to those who attended the rally.

¶17. (SBU) Aweys told the crowd that he congratulates the TFG parliament in its endorsement of Sharia law. He then began to ask rhetorically what kind of Sharia law this government intends to implement because it endorsed Sharia only after gaining "permission" to do so from Ethiopia and the United States. Aweys said that because Ethiopia and the U.S. did not condemn this decision, all Somalis must be suspicious.

Perspectives on Aweys

¶18. (SBU) Sheikh Abdiqadir Somow (Hawiye/Abgaal) spokesman for the Alhu Sunna Wal Jamma network told us Aweys is still highly regarded within his Ayr community. However, the generalized call for peace among Mogadishu residents suggests that Aweys will have little chance to influence his own community to oppose the TFG. A member of President Sharif's staff agreed and told us the Ayr community would not blindly follow Aweys in his opposition to the government. Both contacts asserted that the Ayr community is keen on grooming Aweys as a ceremonial clan leader in order to use his popularity to gain favor from the government in return. Others argue that Aweys' absence and HI's violent opposition against the government significantly eroded Aweys' influence. Our contacts aver that Aweys has no option but to accept peace in order to remain relevant. One prominent Mogadishu-based civil society leader said, "Aweys' main preoccupation now is how to save face and he can only do that by

accepting peace and supporting the government without conditions."

¶9. (SBU) Many speculated that Aweys timed his arrival to coincide with the absences of President Sharif and Prime Minister Sharmarke to unify the armed opposition groups against the TFG. However, most believed that Aweys no longer has the influence to do so. Our contacts told us that Aweys did not speak in his typical antagonistic manner and some even reported that he appeared "soft" and "reconciliatory." They also commented that many were disappointed that Aweys did not articulate the mission for his visit. While he has not indicated his intention, most believe that he is Mogadishu to stay.

RANNEBERGER